



Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

By email

Dear Sir Michael.

22 January 2015

We have over recent weeks discussed Ofsted's role in inspecting Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and this was also the subject of questions at my select committee appearance. Thank you very much for your engagement on this issue. I thought it would be helpful if, in light of these discussions, I set out my views in this area.

Like you I am keen to ensure that MATs are properly held to account for their performance in the delivery of high quality education in their academies. I believe we can achieve this by building on the approach adopted in the focused inspections of MATs Ofsted has already carried out and clarifying any areas of uncertainty.

Starting point - individual academy inspection

I am clear that the starting point should be the inspection of individual academies. The focus on a MAT should flow from this, considering the outcomes being achieved by their academies and the views of the academies on the quality of the support offered from the MAT. Ofsted may also wish to canvass the views of academies in the MAT but not being inspected. These findings should be drawn together to support a professional dialogue with the MAT which focuses in particular on the effectiveness of governance arrangements and school improvement activity. Ofsted should concentrate on the support being provided to achieve good school-level outcomes, recognising the freedom of institutions to determine how best to achieve them.

Focused inspections

I believe this can be achieved by batching together academies that are due to be inspected in the current year, this would include both s5 and s8 monitoring inspections. This should be done where sensible, where there are a sufficient number due to be inspected to warrant this approach. The focus should be on larger MATs and I would expect a focused inspection to be most effective where there are 5 or more academies which can be considered together. That

said I would agree that there may be exceptional cases, for example pressing performance concerns, where focused inspection outside these parameters would be sensible. It is, however, important that the number of academies in a focused inspection sample represents a reasonable proportion of the total number of academies in the MAT.

Ofsted's focus should continue to be at academy level and focused inspection should represent a small proportion of academy inspection activity and should not unreasonably delay individual inspections when due. I was pleased to hear you are also keen to examine the impact of MATs where there is evidence of strong performance and agree that better performing MATs should be in scope as well as those where there are concerns. When you select MAT's for focused inspection, I am happy for you to draw on the full range of data and information that you hold. However, it seems sensible to focus in particular on data and information that indicates the change over time, for example the trajectory of achievement or inspection outcomes for each academy in the MAT.

Inspection process

I would expect that Ofsted would meet with staff from the MAT shortly after the individual inspections have taken place. They should share and discuss the evidence already gathered and collect and consider further evidence to demonstrate the impact of the MAT's work with its academies. While the focus must remain on the academies that have been inspected I agree the dialogue should include consideration of achievement and other relevant data for all of the MAT's academies. It should also consider the arrangements the MAT has made for the effective overseeing, challenge and support of individual academies. Inspectors would then be able to draw together the range of evidence and make a balanced assessment of the work of the chain with the academies inspected.

The discussion with the MAT should be driven by the findings from the individual inspections and remain outcomes focused. It is important that Ofsted's discussions to consider the arrangements the MAT has in place to support the individual academies respects the important distinction between Ofsted's interests and matters which are more appropriately overseen by EFA. I look to the EFA to provide assurances over the use of public funds by trusts and their compliance with the rigorous and transparent accountability system, which it does by monitoring financial management and governance in academy trusts. This is of course in addition to other measures such as the annual publication of audited academy accounts, which provide further assurance.

Publication

I recognise the importance of transparency and support Ofsted's preference for publishing a letter to the MAT summarising the findings from the individual inspections of the academies which have been batched together, as well as additional information gained about the support provided by the MAT. Prior to publication, the MAT should be provided with the opportunity to comment on

the conclusions arising from the focused inspections and consider the evidence underpinning them. Their response should be reviewed before publication and reflected appropriately in the final published letter.

The published findings should make clear the sample of academies that have been included in the focused inspection and those which have not. The published letter should also provide information about the performance of the academies which have not been inspected, so that the wider position across the MAT can be understood. It should also reflect the policy and legal frameworks that govern the responsibilities of MATs. I am pleased that you agree that a binary judgement of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the MAT is inappropriate and that comment on the MAT's performance should be provided through narrative.

The publication of a letter to the MAT summarising the findings from the focused inspections will of course be in addition to the publication of the individual inspection report for each inspected academy in question, which will be published in the normal fashion.

Need for a framework

We have discussed whether an extension or formalisation of Ofsted's power in this area was necessary. The propositions above can be achieved within Ofsted's existing remit, as the focus would remain around the s5 and s8 inspections of the individual academies. Consequently I do not propose any formal extension to Ofsted's remit, nor do I think the drafting of a separate framework is necessary, given the power is in place as is the s5 framework. Transparency and clarity on the Ofsted role is of course important and to support this I will be publishing this letter on the Department's website as well as disseminating it to MATs and approved academy sponsors.

Yours sincerely
Nicky

RT HON NICKY MORGAN MP